



EDITORIAL



A MODERN ELIJAH.

The nearness of the Kippur Day, and the religious spirit engendered throughout the last ten days, make the following letter especially appropriate. The sentiments expressed in it will find a more sympathetic chord, now, than later, when the religious inspiration gathered from the High Holy Days, will have passed:

—Mich.

Editor the Jewish Monitor:

I have just finished reading the editorial in the Monitor of the 5th, entitled "The Tragedy of Judaism." How much the sentiments expressed in it, appeal to me, I feel you will know without my saying so.

We indeed need, and need badly, a modern Elijah who will possess the courage to lift up his voice in behalf of our beloved religion. I sometimes feel that the first work of such a modern evangelist should be among the American rabbinate. I am sure that you will agree with me that the average rabbi, for one reason or another, does little to keep alive the religious fire, but you probably know how I feel about the matter. I am convinced that certain radical teachings by rabbis have done more harm to us religiously than they ever have done good. Existing religious indifference is not of course wholly the fault of the pulpit, but don't you think it has failed largely in its duty in temporizing their duties to meet the too liberal views of the pew.

If a change is to come about bringing with it a swing back to religious thought, it must be through the active, zealous efforts of the pulpit. I am still hopeful that any Elijah will find his way to a rabbinical conference, and rise with might and zeal in an effort to make the American rabbinate recognize that it is its sacred duty to arouse our people from the religious lethargy in which we have fallen. It will take courage and fervor. May God grant that I may yet see the consummation of one of the dearest desires of my life, that is, the re-Judaization of our people.

Yours truly,

This letter is worthy of preservation. If we were to say in a few words when we think an Elijah such as the one mentioned in this letter will arise, we would answer, when the whole congregation of Israel, or at least a large majority of it, will feel as does the writer. For after all the prophet was right when he said, ka'am kakohen—like people, like priest.

That we need a re-Judaization, no one can deny. We feel, however, that our correspondent is somewhat too hard on the rabbis. It is not fair to the Jewish ministry to judge all the rabbis by those who for one reason or another, have failed to re-awaken in their congregations the dormant enthusiasm for the faith of our fathers.

We do have men who have brought their congregations to a realization of their duties and obligations to their religion. We have men who are brave and fearless—and who put their positions above their salaries. We do not fully agree with our contributor that the average rabbi does little to keep alive the religious fire. There are some who do not—but the larger number by far, make an honest effort to do so.

We believe that our writer is eminently correct in the criticism that we have temporized too much. We have thrown off more than we should have thrown off—and the result is that we have lost a great

deal of that charm of Judaism, which appeals to the formal side and the esthetic taste of many individuals. But let us not forget that historically, the rabbis in Israel were simply the messengers of the congregations, and that always, the mass has determined the path of Israel—not the individuals, even though rabbis. Even in the days when the schools were the life of our religion, it was the mass scholarship—not the individual scholarship, that kept alive the flame of Judaism.

In these newer days only, have we entrusted the fate of our religion to specialists—rabbis we call them, and we are free to confess that so far as the leadership of some of them is concerned—our critic is correct. On the other hand, where are the congregations that have permitted themselves to be thus misled—is their responsibility not as great as that of the misleading minister, especially when he who errs errs only on the side of judgment, not of motive or intent?

Existing religious indifference is as much the result of conditions over which rabbis have no control as it is over the liberalism of the teachers themselves and their congregations. The cry of universal brotherhood had a powerful appeal for men fifty years ago, and the reformers who flourished then, and their intellectual descendants of today, still feel that only a radical liberalism can lead to the consummation of a universal brotherhood. They feel that as long as the ethical essentials of Judaism are observed, we are loyal to the Past. They believe in an evolution of men through religious training, and they discard those elements which are not conducive to the realization of those ideals which to them, make for Universalism.

Certainly, they do not want to see Judaism disappear; and they decry the great indifference for which they hold themselves blameless, but which is weaning away from us, thousands of our best sons and daughters. They do not realize that the very nature of their attitude forces them into a position of compromise with the dominant faith, and we find them saying things about other faiths, which in the minds of their auditors extol these others at the expense of their own. If, for instance, the ethics of Jesus is as fine as those of the prophets; if Jesus was as great a prophet as Isaiah—and greater—why then not join the liberal element of the dominant faith? And this has been done by many a Jew, whose first inspiration to do this came—not from the pew, but from the pulpit. We need not, of course, expatiate on the plaudits which Jewish ministers get, when they extol Jesus and place him among the prophets.

We agree, with our writer that if, under the present organization of our religious forces, lay and clerical, a change is to come about, it must come through the efforts of the pulpit. And it will come through the pulpit, provided the pew does its duty. And here is the rub. Our pew is very often a wrongly-directed one. It has the heart—but hasn't the mind. It is like the little boy who wanted to learn how to swim but was afraid to go into the water.

We want to see a pew which will extend full liberty to its minister. We want to see pews which will not muzzle their teacher. We want to see Temples which will stand by their rabbis when these will expose the sins

of their congregants, the short-comings of their officers, the empty-mindedness of their membership, and the ignorance of their pew leaders. It is being done now—but in mighty small doses—and believe us, readers, even the giving of small doses is a joy to the rabbis who administer them.

But let a man come out too fearlessly; let him raise his voice too prophetically; let him decry sin too literally—we really mean truthfully, and you will find that the congregants will make the path of duty for the minister so thorny, that neither rabbi nor congregation will be effective. If the congregants will not actually resign, the men and women who feel that they have been "hit," will pester the teacher until his self-respect will force him to heroic measures. And what has been gained? A disgusted rabbi, a discouraged congregation and no constructive result. There may be no thundering Elijah's in the pulpit—and there are not; but many a rabbi has put into the hearts of his hearers, the still small voice of their God. The objection is, that not enough have done this.

There IS indifference, apathy, lack of warmth in our religious life, and lack of a will to sacrifice for our faith. A change MUST come—let us speak of this later.

We want to close this installment, by thanking our contributor, and acknowledging our appreciation of his letter.

RABBI GOLDBERG IN WICHITA FALLS.

We are very glad to welcome back to the Southwest, our former Texas colleague, Rabbi David Goldberg, formerly of Corsicana, Texas. He now comes to Wichita Falls, where he has received a most flattering offer.

Rabbi Goldberg will resign his chaplaincy in the Navy—he was the first Jewish minister to be appointed as a chaplain in the late war, and in the regular army, and will remove within a short time to his new home.

The new minister is a young man, a capable man, and a learned man. His presence in that thriving city will mean much not only to the Jewish population, but for the whole city, as he is a large-calibred man, whose advice and counsel will be of benefit to his townsmen.

The Jewish Monitor, to which Rabbi Goldberg was a frequent contributor, extends its heartiest congratulations to his congregation, and to him, a hearty welcome.

FORGIVE US, RABBI ROSENBAUM.

The very excellent sermon in last week's Monitor, entitled "The Power of Chance," was written by Rabbi David Rosenbaum of Austin, the author of the popular series, "Chips from a Rabbinical Workshop." We regret that the "make-up" man took it for granted that everybody who would read the sermon, would know that it was by Rabbi Rosenbaum, and we are making this correction so that instead of it being taken for granted, that it was written by him, our readers will know it to be a fact.